



Distributing Emergency Aid to College Students

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- Emergency aid is a critical resource for students facing economic shortfalls that can disrupt their education
- Approaches and practices for aid distribution affect its efficacy
- The following recommendations are derived from work done by the Wisconsin HOPE Lab and other scholars

- Create a protocol for aid distribution that prioritizes speed
- Keep the application process and determination assessment to a minimum to move swiftly
- Quickly identify and remove any barriers to cutting checks
 - Great Lakes [found](#) that issuing checks within 48 hours of the approval of an emergency aid application is critical

- Lack of [trust](#) in the current financial aid system
- By having their back in an emergency, institutions can re-establish a positive relationship with their students
- Integrate a culture of caring into emergency aid programs and communication
 - [Tips](#) for effective outreach to cash-strapped students

- Emergency aid is often restricted to non-tuition expenses, but avoid going beyond that qualifier
- Excluding other items because of a perception that they are foreseeable disadvantages aid recipients
- Students most commonly need assistance with
 - Housing (rent and utilities)
 - Transportation (car repairs, bus pass)
 - Emergency medical care

- Avoid using federal student aid as a qualifier for emergency aid
- Many students are put at a double disadvantage simply because they cannot file a FAFSA
 - e.g. they are undocumented, cannot access their parents' information, etc.
- Requiring students to accept federal student loans to access emergency aid disadvantages students who are least able to take on debt

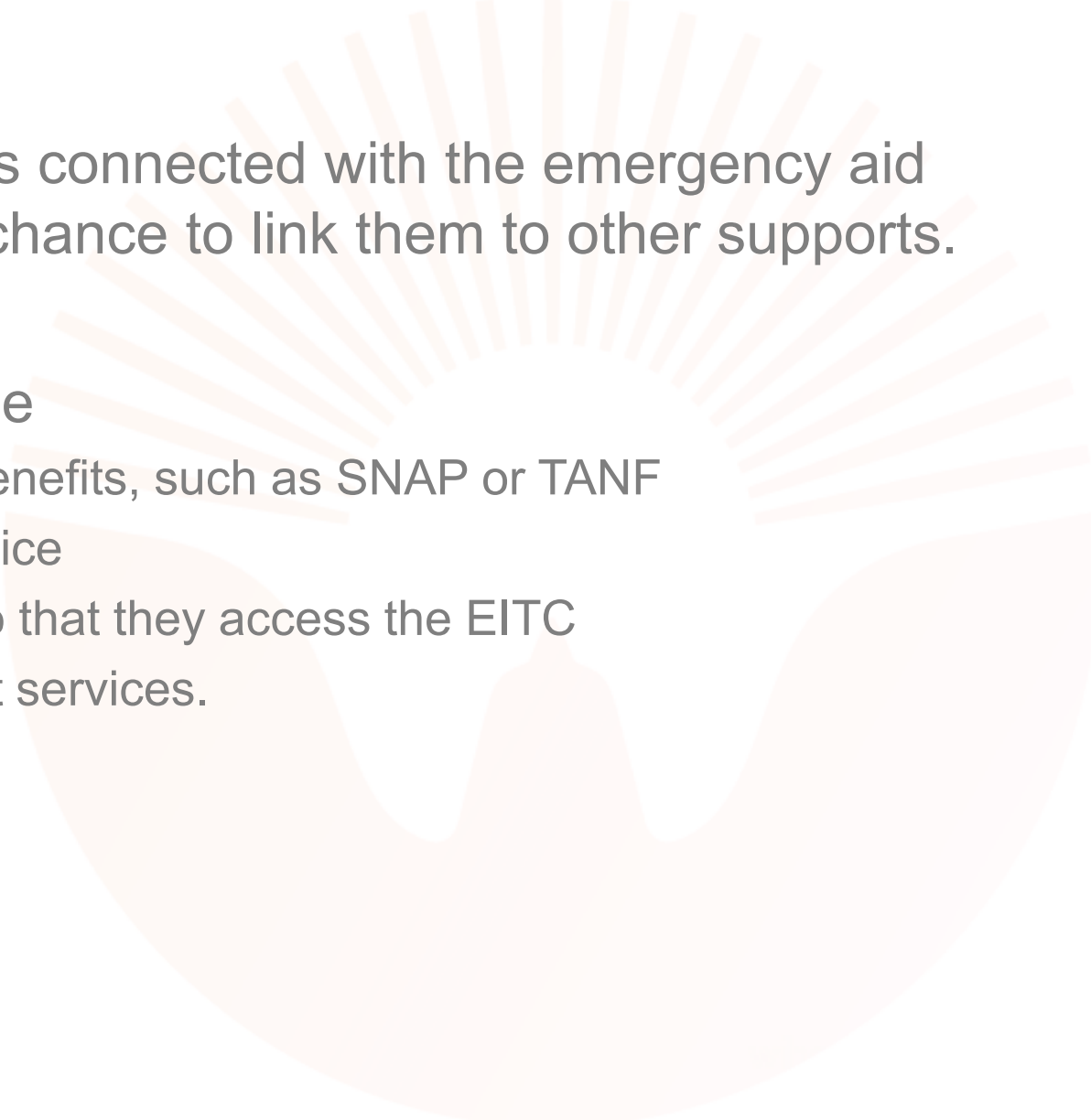
- Target aid to those with the least access to other grants
- Students who most need emergency aid are often
 - part-time
 - have middling grades (B's and C's rather than A's)
 - are often marginalized in one more way (e.g. they have children, are racial/ethnic minorities, are undocumented, etc.)
- To allocate emergency aid, assess whether the financial need is imminent, whether it is temporary, and whether it could affect the students' ability to stay in college

- Documentation not only helps with proper stewardship of funds but also with storytelling about the program and evaluation of its impact
- To that end, keep track of
 - who participates in the program
 - the timing of their requests
 - how those requests were met
 - any other services they were referred to

- A recent [report](#) from NASPA suggests that “word of mouth” is the most common form of communication about emergency aid
- Colleges should instead be encouraged to distribute information across the institution in the following ways:
 - On the syllabus – adding a statement like [this](#) about basic needs security
 - In the classroom - providing professors with a single flyer or PowerPoint slide about the program to share with students
 - In bathrooms – effective awareness raising work on sensitive topics is often done with flyers posted on the doors of bathroom stalls

- Rationing scarce resources is important but keeping the program a secret can prevent students from getting the help they need
- Instead advertise the program, keep track of demand, and maintain a waiting list which helps demonstrate
 - the need for additional financial support (use the stories of wait-listed students when approaching funder)
 - the efficacy of the program by comparing outcomes of students who received emergency aid to those who were wait-listed

- Cash assistance is critical, but other types of support to address major financial needs such as food and housing are also important.
 - Use strategic external partnerships with local food banks and housing authorities to put programs into place.
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- Once a student has connected with the emergency aid program, this is a chance to link them to other supports.
 - These could include
 - Access to public benefits, such as SNAP or TANF
 - Pro-bono legal advice
 - Tax preparation, so that they access the EITC
 - Case management services.
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Wisconsin HOPE Lab resource

- Goldrick-Rab, S. & Cady, C. [Distributing Emergency Aid to College Students: Recommendations and Sample Distribution Protocol.](#)
Wisconsin HOPE Lab. (2017)